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EDWIN HAMLIN WOODRUFF AN APPRECIATION

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The students who have been in Professor Woodruff's classes well know what kind of a human being he is, for he is no mollusk. He has a unique personality, as one would speedily learn on coming in contact with him. The real Woodruff has withdrawn from the scene of his labors. The Woodruff tradition will continue to grow. To preserve some of his lineaments for posterity, I have undertaken to write this appreciation of him. Inadequate as it is to catch the fine spirit and action of the man, it may serve to preserve his memory with more accuracy than the spoken word. We were colleagues on the Cornell law faculty from 1896 to 1904 and I his friend and admirer then and thereafter. My task is one of affection.

When the Cornell Law School opened in 1887, Edwin Hamlin Woodruff was one of the eleven seniors. In 1896 he became a member of the law faculty, was acting dean 1914-1916, Dean 1916-1921, and professor of law until he retired in 1927. Other scholastic callings have attracted him. He had been an instructor in English in Cornell and librarian and acting professor of law in Stanford University, but when he returned to his native Ithaca and to Cornell, he came to stay. He lectured in the Chicago Law School for two summers but aside from these excursions he gave to the law school his constant and untiring attention.

His theory of law teaching would avoid the weakness of the disciplinary system on the one hand and of the informational system on the other. It may be briefly stated thus: While mental discipline and the legal attitude must be of primary consequence in teaching fundamentals, yet some courses, or at least parts of some courses, may well be taught by methods candidly instructive rather than disciplinary in order, so that the law student may cover the entire field of law, and may not be left without a guide in the field covered only by optional courses.

He began his published work as a law teacher in 1894 when with E. W. Huffcut he edited "Cases on Contract," of which he put forth

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a fourth edition in 1925. His "Cases on Domestic Relations" was published in 1897, and went into a third edition in 1920. His "Introduction to the Study of Law" was published in 1898. "Cases on Insurance" appeared in 1900 and went into a second edition in 1924. "Selected Cases on the Law of Quasi Contracts" first appeared in 1905 and was followed by a second edition in 1917. He has taken a keen interest in the CORNELL LAW QUARTERLY. His editorial in the first number is an admirable statement of the purposes and aims of the new publication. The reviewers have taken note of the practical character and painstaking thoroughness of his case books, of their extensive annotations, their admirable citation of authorities, pertinent statutes and illustrative material, and of their suggestions for collateral reading, especially in the articles and notes in the law reviews. These volumes bear only a general resemblance to the earlier collections of cases. They modernize the case method of teaching law. They demonstrate the rare scholarship of the author and his clear understanding of the needs of the student. Equally removed from the dogmatism of the text book and the weary wilderness of collections of ancient cases, they stimulate the thought and guide the research.

The real service of the law teacher comes from his work in the class room. Blackstone's Commentaries is an immortal work but it was said of the author that he was "a formal, precise and affected lecturer", "cold, reserved and weary, affecting a frigid pride." Professor Woodruff made the dull pages of the law reports radiate with warmth. The dramatic facts of the case were developed by him with originality and force. The law became a living thing. He loved to arouse the zeal of his students in the discussion of the why and wherefore of juristic rules and the relative weight of conflicting authorities. He kept pace with the outpouring of judicial decisions. With a keenly critical mind, he never arrogated to himself the airs of omnipotence. He was willing to concede the authority of the courts without constantly particularizing their peccancy.

He has his favorites among the authors of judicial opinions. The artistry of a judge's work appeals to him. Judicial clarity of thought and expression, soundness of conclusion and apprehension of the relation of the decision to the realities of life receive his ready recognition. Careless grammar, false rhetoric, and abuse of the English language, irritate him beyond measure.

In all his years of teaching, of constant class room encounters with the quick and the dead, the earnest and the careless, the conscientious and the unscrupulous, he did not become indifferent or apathetic.

He took his work seriously and never spared himself in body or mind. Each year presented its new problems. Never content to remain in a static condition, he was and still is an intellectual dynamic on his colleagues and his students and his friends. It is to be regretted that his methods of work, so fruitful of results, were followed by him so intensely that he wore himself out physically at a time when his mental faculties are at their prime.

Like Matthew Arnold, he would define culture as "the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit." He has, however, a well-defined notion that the best does not necessarily include the lucubrations of the German legal philosophers or the pedantry of the doctrinaire. An omnivorous reader in all fields, he is often able to baffle the specialist in his specialty. His talk is as illuminating as that of Dr. Johnson. His humor as sparkling as champagne. On the rare occasions when he could be induced to speak at public meetings his eloquence and wit won his hearers. While a latent impishness in his disposition has led him at times to bewilder his colleagues in the course of faculty debates by the unexpectedness of his argument, his judgments on academic matters are as a rule basically sound and are sought by those in authority. President Farrand said, at the meeting of the Cornell Law Association held in his honor, that he is "one of the clearest sighted, one of the best informed, one of the wisest men, and one of the men whose ideals are absolutely immovable in their soundness" with whom he had come in contact at Cornell.

Professor Woodruff does not hold himself aloof from an interest in the practical world. He has always been a consistent Democrat, or, at least, consistently a Democrat, in politics. The pomp and circumstance of academic life, the elaborate conventions of society, win little reverence from him. Jeffersonian simplicity and Jacksonian dislike of sham are to him no mere shibboleths but the true ideals of American life.

His influence within the University will be greatly missed. His loyalty to Cornell, his jealous pride in the work of the law school and of its graduates have been an inspiration and a delight to all who have come under his power. A generous willingness to help his former students and associates, whether of the bench or the bar has often been reflected without credit in opinions and briefs.

He is a good man. All in all, we shall not see his like again for he belongs to the pioneer age of law teaching. The road which he and the earlier instructors cleared is followed with greater ease by their successors.